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SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: KDP INTEL DIRECTOR AND KRG PM BARZANI
ON IRAN

Classified By: RRT Erbil Regional Coordinator Jess Baily for Reasons 1.
4 (b,d)

This is an Erbil Regional Reconstruction Team message.

11. (S) Summary: In a June 11 meeting with Senior Adviser Thomas Krajewski to discuss Kurdish reaction to initial UNAMI reports offering advice for the resolution of disputed internal boundaries (septel), Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) Intelligence (Parastin) Director Masrur Barzani offered his views on Iran's reaction to deepening U.S.-Iraq ties, Iran's relationship with Iraqi Kurds, and Iran's perception of U.S. policy in the region. In a separate June 12 meeting, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani expressed concern over the possibility of increased Iranian interference in the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) should Iraqi President (and PUK SecGen) Jalal Talabani become incapacitated and the PUK fall into disarray. End summary.

12. (S) KDP Intelligence Director Masrur Barzani expressed surprise at Iran's public and direct rejection of U.S. plans to conclude a status of forces agreement (SOFA) with Iraq, to govern the presence of U.S. troops, and opined that the announcement sounded more like an "order" to the Iraqi government. Iran's unwillingness to abide by its international nuclear agreements in the face of international pressure and renewed calls from the U.S. and European Union, and its efforts to destabilize Iraq through support of armed militias, revealed a "game that Iran was playing," Masrur suggested. Noting that Iran had great patience, he indicated that "a very strong message was needed" to compel Iran to cease its interference in Iraqi affairs.

13. (S) Masrur offered that Iran was calculating its policies in the region in the context of perceived weakness of U.S. positions. He pointed to the Iranian view that the "destabilization" of Iraq since 2003 was seen by Tehran as a failure of U.S. policy; and that similarly, the political gains of Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza equally could be seen as "victories" for Iran. Masrur blamed the "very weak" international reaction to Hezbollah's rise for failing to yield any real check on Iranian influence, and ultimately serving to embolden Iran: "these are messages they (Iran) are getting," he said.

14. (S) Iran's relations with Iraqi Kurds were tactical, more fragile and nuanced than its relationships with Shi'ites in the south. Masrur continued. Iran would do nothing to strengthen the Kurds or the KRG for fear of encouraging its own Kurdish minority, but it would choose to use its influence to interfere. Given traditional trade relationships and geography, Masrur noted that Iran was very active in Sulaimaniyah province. Masrur opined that Iran was waiting out the U.S. administration, that it did not anticipate any military confrontation with the United States before the U.S. presidential election in November, and judged the likelihood of such a confrontation as even more remote after November.

15. (S) In a June 12 meeting, KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani expressed concern to Senior Adviser Krajeski about the prospects for the future strength and cohesion of the PUK should Iraqi President (and PUK SecGen) Jalal Talabani die or become incapacitated. Pointing to internal PUK splits and the absence of a clear successor, Nechirvan said the "chaos" that could ensue would create opportunities for Iran to increase its interference in the PUK and in Sulaimaniyah. Regarding Talabani's health, Nechirvan joked, "I told him to eat sushi," and, emphasizing that it is in the KDP's interest for the PUK to remain strong, Nechirvan said "we probably pray for Jalal's health more than the PUK."

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